To the Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Dewsbury Deanery and the Parish of St Ignatius, Ossett

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I wish to thank all those who took part in the Dewsbury Deanery Reorganisation Review. I am particularly grateful to those who were members of the various Parish Advisory Groups, the Deanery Steering Group and to the parishioners, religious and clergy who attended the public meeting with me at the beginning of the consultation last December. Thank you for giving so generously of your time and for all the work that you have done.

Having received the report from the Dewsbury deanery and listened to the views of the clergy, I am pleased to accept the recommendations of the Deanery Steering Group which resulted from the consultation. These recommendations were that:

1. The parish of St Patrick, Birstall and the parish of St Mary, Batley should be amalgamated;
2. The parish of St Paul, Cleckheaton and the Parish of Holy Spirit, Heckmondwike should be amalgamated;
3. The parish of St Paulinus, Dewsbury, the parish of St Joseph, Batley Carr, and the parish of St Aidan, Mirfield should be amalgamated;
4. The boundaries of the current parishes of St Paulinus, Dewsbury and St Mary, Batley, should be adjusted so as to include some of the neighbouring territory of the parish of St Thomas More, Chickenley. The remaining territory of the parish which contains St Thomas More church (the Chickenley area of the current parish), should be amalgamated with the parish of St Ignatius, Ossett.

Church of St Thomas More, Chickenley

It was clear from the consultation that there was a preference for the church building at Chickenley to remain open if at all possible. Sadly though, the number of faithful attending the church in Chickenley is far too small to financially sustain the ongoing maintenance costs and the very significant repairs that the church premises urgently requires. St Thomas More parish is also carrying a very considerable debt and it is clear that it is no longer viable as an independent parish.

It would be unfair to the parish of St Ignatius, Ossett, or to any of the parishes in the Dewsbury deanery, to be expected to take on the responsibility for the debt and the costs of repairing and maintaining the church at Chickenley as a result of an amalgamation with the parish of St Thomas More. It is for these reasons that I have, with great reluctance, come to the conclusion that there is no other realistic option than to close the church building in Chickenley as a place of worship. After the adjustment of its boundaries, the remaining territory of St Thomas More’s parish will be amalgamated with that of St Ignatius’, Ossett.
I know that this decision will bring much sorrow to the loyal parishioners in Chickenley who have valiantly tried to maintain their church premises over the years. I hope though, that some artefacts or elements from the church will be able to be transferred to, and used within the church of St Ignatius so that the Catholic history and life of the community in Chickenley will be preserved in a visible and memorial form for its current parishioners and for future generations.

I wish to thank in a special way Fr Eric Cheetham, who in his retirement from holding full-time parochial office has provided for the pastoral care of the parishioners in Chickenley with great diligence and love for many years now. I know that he will, as will all the clergy, religious and faithful of the Dewsbury area, be saddened by the closure of the church building at Chickenley and share in the anguish of heart of the people of St Thomas More’s parish.

A date for the closure of the church building as a place of worship cannot yet be determined but will be considered as soon as possible after the canonically required consultation has taken place with the Diocesan Council of Priests.

Implementation of the Recommendations
The recommendations above will be implemented in accordance with the pastoral need of each parish and the capacity available to me to deploy clergy within the Diocese of Leeds over the next few years. This means that not all of the recommendations can or will be implemented at the same time. I anticipate therefore, that the majority of the present clergy will continue to remain in office until I need to implement each change. This will enable the current parish priests to use their experience and their personal knowledge to assist and collaborate with the faithful in their parishes to implement the reorganisation.

I must emphasise though, that urgent situations can and do arise in the Diocese which may make it necessary for me to implement changes to the deployment of clergy within the Dewsbury deanery during the course of the next year. I assure you though, that I will do this only with the needs of the Dewsbury parishes and the individual clergy foremost in mind.

Canonical Amalgamation of Parishes
One of the principal issues that will need to be considered during the transitional period is a more detailed timetable for the implementation of the canonical amalgamation for each of the recommendations. The proposed date for each individual amalgamation will be determined by me in dialogue with the parish priests. The recommendations concerning the amalgimations and the changes to the boundaries of parishes must also be presented to the Diocesan Council of Priests for consultation before any alterations can take place.

Initially therefore, parishes will be ‘paired’ informally rather than canonically amalgamated. This will respect and maintain for the time being each parish’s existing distinct identity in Canon Law, but will also facilitate as much collaboration as possible among clergy, religious and parishioners to plan for the future of their parishes.
Once the date for each of the canonical amalgamations has been determined, the following will need to be planned for by the respective ‘paired’ parishes before a formal decree effecting a change is published:

- The timetable for the implementation of the amalgamation;
- The rationalisation of Mass times;
- The publication of a single parish newsletter;
- The formation of a single parish council; and,
- The formation of a single parish finance committee, etc.

In discussion with me, the clergy will also need to determine the location of the residence for the parish priest for each of the amalgamated parishes in the Dewsbury deanery and the future usage of any vacated property.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my immense gratitude to all of the clergy of the Dewsbury deanery for the way in which they have endeavoured to work together during this review and the magnanimity with which they have responded in their willingness to assist with implementing the recommendations. I also thank the parish priest of St Ignatius’, Ossett, for his collaboration in the consultation.

As we discussed at the public meeting held in December 2016, it is important that the principles of flexibility and collaboration be at the forefront of the implementation of these recommendations. I hope therefore that all the clergy, religious and faithful of the parishes within the Dewsbury deanery and the parish of St Ignatius, Ossett, will continue to show the same greatness and generosity of heart which has characterised the response that they have made to the reorganisation to date. Difficulties and problems may arise but if the faith, mutual respect, and the willingness to collaborate that was so evident in the public meeting and in the Steering Group can prevail, I have every hope that, with the Lord’s help, we can overcome these together.

I humbly ask you to keep me in your prayers.

Assuring you of my prayers and every blessing, I remain
Your servant in the Lord Jesus Christ

+ Marcus
* Marcus Stock
Bishop of Leeds

Given at Leeds on the Feast of Blessed Dominic Barberi, 26th August 2017, and appointed to be read in the churches of the Dewsbury Deanery and the Parish of St Ignatius, Ossett, on Saturday and Sunday 9th and 10th September 2017.